

Meditations: Wednesday of the Eighth Week of Ordinary Time

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during the eighth week of Ordinary Time. The topics are: the meaning of suffering; drinking from the Lord's chalice; pride in service.

- The meaning of suffering
- Drinking from the Lord's chalice
- Pride in service

JESUS' ANNOUNCEMENT of his Passion perplexed the apostles. They couldn't understand why their Master, who performed great miracles and attracted crowds, said that He would be handed over to the chief priests, flogged, and condemned to death (cf. *Mk* 10:32-45). Some of them might have considered it meaningless: "Why is Jesus anticipating something so terrible? If He knows this is going to happen, why doesn't He find a way to avoid such a tragic end?" We have the same questions when we experience the agony of suffering, whether physical, spiritual, or some combination of the two. Often, indeed, we cannot understand why God allows misfortunes to happen in the world and in our own lives. We may consider, like the apostles, that it would be logical for the Lord to do everything possible to prevent these things.

No response that can fully satisfy these questions: the meaning of suffering will always, to a large extent, remain a mystery. However, we can turn our gaze to the Passion, as the saints teach us to do. Perhaps it would have been more logical for God to demonstrate his power to eliminate injustices and evil when He redeemed us from sin. However, He did it through the apparent failure of the cross: "He allows evil to unleash itself upon Him and carries it on Himself to conquer it."^[1] And just when everything seemed lost, when three days had passed since his death, God intervened and raised his Son. The seed of salvation takes root according to the times and ways of providence. "Jesus, who chose to go this way, calls us to follow Him on the same path of humility. When, at certain times of life, we don't find a way out of our difficulties, when we plunge into the densest darkness, it is the moment of our humiliation and

complete stripping, the hour in which we experience that we are fragile and sinners. It is precisely then, in that moment, that we must not hide our failure but open ourselves confidently to hope in God, as Jesus did. "[2]

THE ANNOUNCEMENT of the Passion contrasts with the apostles' desires. Jesus speaks of pain and defeat. In contrast, James and John approach Him and ask, *Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory (Mk 10:35)*. But Jesus does not reproach them for these aspirations. We can even imagine that He felt some satisfaction at the request, because it showed that, in some way, the brothers understood that they could have no greater goal than that of spending their whole lives with Him. All the same, He

responds, *You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?* (Mk 10:38). Jesus is patient and dialogues with the apostles to help them better understand the life that awaits them when they follow his path. Not everything will be as straightforward as it is at this moment. In the middle of a plethora of miracles and the crowd's enthusiasm, they may not have realized that anything bad could happen to them. That's why Jesus corrects the disciples' perspective: in a world marked by sin and the influence of the devil's forces, there can be no glory without the cross.

James and John answer without hesitation: *We can* (Mk 10:39). They were probably not fully aware of what they had just said. Like someone in love, they felt ready to do whatever it took to attain the love

that gave meaning to their lives. And Jesus, indeed, acknowledges that they will do so: *The cup that I drink you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized* (Mk 10:39). Although at times the apostles may not be faithful and may even succumb to the devil's snares, in the end, they will drink from that cup and give their lives for the Gospel. Even in the dark times of human history and our lives, God overcomes death and is the Lord of history. "It is not presumptuous for us to say *possumus*. (we can; we are ready)," St. Josemaría taught. "Jesus Christ teaches us this divine way and wants us to follow it, for he has made it human and accessible to our weakness. That is why he lowered himself so."^[3] Jesus does not only set us an example: He also accompanies us at all times and gives us his grace so that, like the apostles, we can drink from the cup that leads us to access the sources of glory.

THE OTHER apostles were indignant at James and John's request. Perhaps some reproached them for seeking glory when Jesus had just announced his condemnation to death. But others may have felt a different kind of indignation, that of seeing others doing better, because they also wanted a position close to the Master in his glory, and those two were getting ahead of them. Jesus, knowing these thoughts, gathered them all and said, *Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all* (Mk 10:44).

Thus Jesus shattered the apostles' expectations. Greatness is not determined by power or recognition but by the desire to serve and by actually serving. The criterion by which someone is great in the eyes of

God is not their ability to influence or dominate but the love with which they treat others, which is expressed through service. This is the logic that makes our existence a sign of beauty and the joy of living with Jesus: using the talents He has given us to make those around us happy. Therefore, we can ask ourselves: to what extent is what I do an expression –in motivation or in the way it is done– of an act of charity, of service?

Blessed Álvaro del Portillo once recalled an aspect of St. Josemaría's life: "How often I have heard the Father say: 'My pride is to serve!' This pride of serving others — the priestly soul — has been instilled in us by the Father in a thousand different ways: through his constant preaching and countless specific deeds, both large and small, such as not allowing others to help him with everyday things, repeating the words of Jesus: '*Non veni ministrari, sed ministrare*' (I

have not come to be served but to serve), or having the words 'To be useful, serve' engraved or written on plaques or screens."^[4] The Virgin Mary also had the pride of serving – *Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord* – which led her to be happy and to win God Himself: *My spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant* (Lk 1:47-48).

^[1] Pope Francis, Audience, 16-IV-2014.

^[2] Ibid.

^[3] St. Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 15.

^[4] Blessed Álvaro del Portillo, Instruction May 1935/14 September 1950, note 14.

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